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T W O
S E R M O N S,
O N E

On 2 T I M. ii. 15.

P R E A C H ' D at the

Rev. Mr. *NESBITT*'s,

T H E O T H E R

On I C O R. iii. 6.

A T

GIRD L E R S - H A L L,

At the setting apart the Reverend Mr.
HURRION, to the Office and Work of
a Pastor in Mr. NESBITT's Church;
and the Reverend Mr. WRIGHT, in
the late Mr. FOXON's.

By *MATTHEW CLARK.*

L O N D O N:

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To the REVEREND

Mr. JOHN HURRION,

AND

Mr. ROBERT WRIGHT,

Together with the

Respective CHURCHES they are
called to watch over in the LORD,

The two following SERMONS are humbly
offered, since at their Desire they are now
published, by their

affectionate Brother and

humble Servant,

Sept. 25, 1724.

MATTHEW CLARK.

THE REV. J. H. BURTON

TO THE REV. J. H. BURTON

FOR M. O. N. J.

ROBERT WRIGHT

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS ARE SIMPLY

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MATTHEW CLARK



S E R M O N I.

ON

2 TIM. ii. 15.

Study to shew thy self approved unto God, a workman, that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.



MAKE no apology for the choice of this subject; only wish, at the conclusion, you may not think the management of it stands in need of one. The text is suited to the occasion, if the discourse does but answer the text; and whilst I am endeavouring to shew what it is to divide the word aright, I do not my self, in the performance, handle it amiss.

We are now met together to pray for a blessing upon the ministry of our worthy and beloved brother *, called under the sad dispensation upon this

Church, to watch over you in the Lord; being sensible, whoever plants, and whoever waters, the increase of all must come from God.

It is no uncommon thing for pastors to be called off from their work by death, and others to enter upon their labours: but here is a successor before a demise, in the life time of your minister, the necessity of the case so requiring, he having been for many months rendered altogether incapable of performing any part of his ministerial office; and there being but little prospect he should ever be restored to his former usefulness.

The providence you are under is indeed dark and melancholy, but not altogether without its bright side: your minister it is true is smitten, but not unto death; this leaves room for faith and prayer: you are a Church not divided and rent in pieces, but happily united among your selves, and now comfortably provided for, and settled again; having one to go in and out before you, under whose ministry you may expect to find pasture for your souls.

Here is another minister to feed this people; and another people for this minister to feed; and upon such a change (shall I call it a translation?) what can be more agreeable and becoming, than humbly to implore the divine blessing both upon minister and people, now entred into this new relation one to another? With prayer it has been thought proper to join the word, that one may help on, and assist the other; this province, at your desire, I have engaged in; wherein I shall be so far from taking upon me to be a dictator to *any*, that I shall not pretend to be so much as an instructor to *many* of you; only, since you have called me to this service, you will allow me to be your remembrancer, while I endeavour to state, what I apprehend to be of great concernment, the right dividing the word of truth, which I shall attempt in the opening this apostolical exhortation to *Timothy*; *study to shew thy self approved unto God, &c.* From whence I observe,

Obj. 1.

Obs. 1. *That the Gospel is the word of truth.* That this is a periphrasis of the Gospel none can doubt; if any could, that passage of the same Apostle would soon satisfy them, *Eph. i. 13. After that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.* An high encomium of the glorious Gospel, wherein there are two things, that more especially recommend it to us; the *goodness* of it, it is the Gospel of our salvation; and the *certainly* of it, it is the word of truth. It brings glad tidings of great joy to a lost world, and makes the noblest discoveries to creatures, benighted and involved in the thickest darkness; and to our comfort, the news it brings is as *true* as it is *good*; and the discoveries it makes are no less certain, than they are glorious.

The Gospel teaches us the greatest truths, that ever were, or ever will be delivered to man. It hath nothing in it that is mean and trifling, but contains things of the utmost importance in themselves, and which it nearly concerns us to know and believe. And it propounds nothing to be believed by us, but what is truth, it being really all that it pretends to be; the word of him that is truth itself. It is no human artifice, nor a cunningly devised fable of any man, or set of men whatsoever; but these are the true sayings of God. The Apostles boldly asserted this, and always stood to it, *We have not followed cunningly devised fables, &c. prophesy of old time came not by the will of man, but holy men of God, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Pet. i. 16, 21.* No man had wisdom enough to devise it, how knowing soever he might be in other respects; it far transcended the utmost of his capacity to make such discoveries, as we meet with in the Gospel. Besides, were he ever so able, it could not come by the will of man; not of a *bad* man, because the whole system is one continued opposition to his own lusts; not of a *good* man, for such a forgery would be a downright contradiction to his character. It must then come from God: and as it is a possible

possible thing for him to make such a revelation, it is highly reasonable to suppose (all things considered) he *would* do so; and that indeed he *hath* done so.

It has moreover all the evidences, {which can reasonably be desired that it is indeed from God. It hath been confirmed by the most unquestionable and surprising miracles; which were all well attested, being done openly in the face of the sun, and the view of all, for truth seeks no corners. These were numerous, and well adjusted, to serve some necessary and valuable end, either as a just punishment of some mens wilful impenitency, or vile and disguised hypocrisie, *Matth. vii. 32. Acts v. 5.* Which yet were but rare, they being generally such as were useful and beneficial to mankind. Whereas the stories of others feats, and particularly of *Appollonius Tyanens*, the *Pythagorean* wanderer, whom some would at least equal with Christ, and set up as his rival, were no better than the ludicrous or impious pranks of a crafty magician, if they had indeed any thing in them at all.

But above all, this word has all internal tokens and characters of divinity. What ever had such an appearance of truth? such impressions of beauty, wisdom and majesty? did any thing ever make such discoveries, or gain such conquests? what was ever so much opposed, and yet so much succeeded? we conclude then, that this is nothing less than the product of God's counsel and wisdom. It is called the everlasting Gospel; and well it may, for it comes from the everlasting God; and if God be its author, we are sure it is a word of truth.

It is therefore to be feared, that they who despise the sacred Scriptures, decry and run down the Gospel as folly and imposture; which not only some men of learning have done, but now a-days, affecting to be thought fashionable, and men of sense, even some of the meaner and more inferior sort of persons take upon them to do, and laugh at those for fools, that believe their Bibles; it is to be

feared,

feared, I say, that either they don't read them at all; or if they do, it is under a strong bias the wrong way, and they would be thought not to believe them to be true, only because they would not have them to be so; for if they are, woe to such wretched scepticks and unbelievers.

This then is the glory of the Gospel; it is a word of truth, and of all others, they that preach it, are concerned to believe it to be so, lest while they proclaim it to the world as *heralds*, they should be no better than *hawkers*, that cry news about the streets, to whom it is all one whether it be true or false, so they can but make their advantage of it.

Obs. 2. *This word of truth is to be divided, and consequently there must be some, whose more immediate and proper work it is to do it; study to shew thyself a workman, rightly dividing the word.* It must be divided; there is a necessity of it; the people need it, and have always done so. It should be explained, confirmed and applied, that is, divided. The Apostle supposes this, and takes it for granted; and as there is need it should be divided, God calls and employs some men more especially in the doing of it; upon whom he bestows necessary gifts and graces severally as he pleases to furnish them for this work. *Study*, says the Apostle to *Timothy*, *herein to shew thyself a workman*; it is thy work and business, as it is of all others put into the ministry, to divide the word.

Obs. 3. *This word of truth ought to be rightly divided.* It should be the care and endeavour, as it is the duty of those that divide the word, to do it aright. *Study to shew thyself a workman, &c. rightly dividing the word of truth.* In speaking to this, I shall endeavour,

I. To shew what it is to divide the word aright.

II. The reasons there are for doing so.

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I. To shew what it is to divide the word aright.

II. The reasons there are for doing so.

III. Apply it in a few things to ministers and people.

First, We are to shew what it is to divide the word aright. Ministers are workmen; as such they have a work to do; and that is, to divide and handle the word, to distribute the bread of life, to dispense the Gospel. This being their work, it is their concern to do it well, strictly according to the original, * *cutting the word aright*. This, as most think, is a metaphor taken from sacrifices, in which the priests that cut the beast up, did, or should accurately distinguish between the parts offered to God, and those that belonged to themselves, or to the persons that brought the offering, that every one might have their proper share; or thus, the priests were to take care in dividing the sacrifices which were laid on God's altar, to cut off and lay aside those parts which were not to be offered, and to sever them from those that were. Some have thought this is taken from parents, and fathers of a family, or stewards and masters of an household, who distribute food to every one under their care, and cut it out as they need, knowing, that which is too much for one, may hardly be enough for another. Many thoughts and debates there are about this matter, when it is applied to preaching. I shall freely give you my own thereon, and endeavour impartially to state what I apprehend is right preaching, or dividing the word aright.

I conceive, a regard is here to be had to the *word* it self, to the *persons* concern'd therein, to the *times* and *seasons* in which it is dispensed, and also to the *manner* of handling it; and if so, then rightly to divide the word, is

To give every text its true and genuine sense; every truth its due weight, and every person their proper

portion, and to suit the word to its particular season; and lastly, to handle it in a way that becomes it.

I. To divide the word aright, is to give every text its strict and proper meaning, so far as we have light into the mind of the Holy Ghost, and do our selves understand it. Our business is not to contrive and invent a new Gospel, but to open and unfold that which we have. We are here, it must be confessed, in an imperfect state, and at the best see but darkly, and know but in part; it becomes us therefore to be cautious and modest in our decisions, since after all our search and enquiry, it is possible we may not hit upon the true sense of some obscure and difficult texts of Scripture; but seeing one part of handling the word is interpretation, and giving the sense of Scripture, we ought, upon a diligent enquiry, and after having well considered the context and coherence, the scope and design of the place, and compared one Scripture with another, according to the best of our knowledge, give every text its proper sense and meaning. Allusions may be, and often are made; but to interpret Scripture merely by the sound of words, is playing with our bibles, and trifling in the preacher, and serves only to impose upon the people, as it induces them to think the text speaks, what it never intended. What we offer from a particular portion of Scripture, should come freely in, and not be forced into the service. It should not only be true in itself, but the truth of the place; not only good fruit, but the fruit which grows upon that tree. This is keeping close to a text, and handling the word aright.

II. Rightly to divide the word, is to give every truth its due weight, so that no necessary things, and profitable to be known, are wholly omitted, and yet the more essential and important truths are chiefly attended to and regarded.

To divide the word aright, is to take care that no necessary truth be wholly neglected and passed over.

The Apostle Paul was not long at Ephesus, about three

years in all, *Acts* xx. 31. and yet at parting, he tells the elders, and appeals to them for the truth of it; *That he kept nothing back that was profitable for them; nor had shunned to declare unto them, the whole counsel of God,* *Acts* xx. 20, 27. It cannot sure be called dividing the word aright, when some things necessary to be known, and useful in their kind are hardly ever insisted on in the whole course of our ministry. A faithful preacher would with-hold nothing from those committed to his charge, which belongs to their edification, but declare the whole counsel of God, and, at times, speak to every truth as near as he can, and so far as he hath attained.

We often hear of Gospel preaching, and true Gospel preachers; but with some persons, this is only preaching one part of the word, wherein if you discharge your selves well, you will not fail of their good opinion; but should you take in the whole compass of the Gospel, change your voice, and press the duties of religion, as well as preach its doctrines, there is some danger this should be pronounced, preaching works, and that by which they can't edify. I wish there was no cause for any complaint upon this account; you'll bear with me when I express my fears, lest among some of us there is too much a fault in this matter. Would to God all the ministers of Christ were more led into the study, knowledge and preaching of Christ, and did determine as the Apostle *Paul* did among the *Corinthians*, not to know any thing, so much as, to know nothing compared with Christ and him crucified. Evangelical, Gospel preachers, truly so, are sure the best preachers, and most likely to do good to the souls of men. But then the question is, who are these Gospel preachers? and what Gospel preaching is? There is a legal way of preaching the Gospel; and my friends, there is an evangelical way of preaching the law. He is the true Gospel preacher, and divides the word aright, that takes in the whole counsel of God, law and gospel, grace and duty, doctrine and practice, faith and repentance, that tells men what Christ hath done and suffered in

in order to their salvation ; and then, what he requires of them, and promises to them on their parts in order to it. I have my self been told by some, that if persons would hear discourses of faith and grace, they must worship in places of such a denomination ; if they desire to hear a discourse of works and morality, they must repair to such a place of worship ; but I don't know, why both these may not be heard in one and the same place, sure I am, they should, and I hope they are.

The law is of use in the hand of the spirit, to give men the knowledge and a conviction of sin. This having made the wound, or discovered it, the Gospel reveals a Saviour, and propounds the remedy. The one makes men sinners of sense, and the other, of hope. The awful thunders of the law, may be of service to awaken secure sinners, as the great and precious promises of the Gospel are designed to relieve and comfort the trembling soul.

Grace and duty, faith, repentance and works, are all necessary in their place. The Apostles preaching turned upon these two grand points, *repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*, Acts xx. 21. And having brought men to repent and believe, he will have this *constantly affirmed, that they be careful to maintain good works*, Tit. ii. 8. We are not always to insist only on one of these, that we should hardly ever hear from some any thing but faith, or from others any thing but works ; both have their use in religion, and ought to have a place in our ministry.

Doctrines and practice will also have their place, if we handle the word aright. Men are to be told what they are to believe, and what they are to do. For this purpose the doctrines of Christianity are to be explained and cleared up, proved and vindicated, that persons may have just notions in religion ; but then, lest they should be mere nationalists, the duties of religion are to be built upon these, and warmly pressed from them. The end of theorems and principles is practice.

We

We should be careful to lay a good foundation in doctrinal truths, that moral duties may be urged upon right principles, and by the strongest and most forcible arguments, else our exhortations thereunto will be weak and enervous; and how earnest soever we may be in them, there will ever be more noise than substance; but having laid this foundation in doctrinal truths, we may hope successfully to build thereon in a practical application. This, we may observe, was the Apostle's method in almost all his epistles; he largely handles the great and substantial doctrines of Christianity, and then improves them in exhortations to practical godliness.

This is to divide the word aright, to give every truth its place, and keep back nothing that is profitable, but so far as we know, to declare the whole counsel of God. But then, though nothing that's necessary to be known should be entirely suppressed, yet

The more essential and important truths, are principally to be attended to, and insisted on. Every thing in Christianity is precious and excellent; but some things are of greater excellency, and more extensive usefulness than others, and ought therefore principally to be regarded; such as most immediately tend to the renewing our natures; the bettering our minds and manners; are reducible to practice; that refer more directly to our last end; are essential to our present comfort, and future happiness; these and the like are things we ought to be taken up in the daily use of.

Some things are preached in order to others; they make way for, and are introductive to them.

Some are external only, and circumstantial, and comparatively of far less moment than many others. It is easy to say in such cases where the stress is to be laid. The kingdom of God doth not consist in meat, drink, days, garbs, outward rites, and customs, &c. There is less danger from any failure or mistake in these things, than those that enter into the vitals of religion. So as to the nature and form of a Church, its officers and discipline, we may apply the words of our Saviour,

These

These ought you not to have left undone ; but then there are other things, which you ought more especially to have regarded, the much weightier matters of the Gospel. Then we are to preach Christ ; make him the alpha and omega of our ministry. His name should triumph in all our sermons, since he is the way, the truth, and the life ; and there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. It was the Apostle's resolution to preach Christ among the *Corinthians*, and nothing but Christ, or however nothing so much as Christ, nothing compared with him, nothing but what was derived from him, or might be reduced to him, and as Christ so him crucified ; he was not ashamed of his Cross, but gloried in it. His life, death, resurrection and intercession ; the things he has done, suffered and purchased ; these were the great subject of his discourses. *We preach not our selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.*

To which succeeds the work of the spirit and the grace of God, in making an effectual application of Christ, and his purchased benefits to the souls of men, which leads to the great doctrines of faith, repentance, the divine birth, the new creature, effectual calling, sanctification and holiness, as things without which no man can be saved ; here should our zeal chiefly spend it self. And thus to lay the stress where it ought to be laid, is to divide the word aright.

III. To divide the word aright, is to give every person their proper portion, cutting out the word of truth so prudently, that as near as may be, none may have any just cause to complain they are neglected in this daily ministration.

The general division of persons is into righteous and wicked, saints and sinners, and a due regard is to be had to each of these, speaking terror to whom terror, and comfort to whom comfort belongs. We are not always to preach as if we had none but converted persons in our assemblies, and such as in our Saviour's sense need no repentance ; nor on the other hand, as if there were none but did need it. Some are Christ's sheep, but not yet

yet gathered into his fold. Regard is to be had to these that they may be brought in; and in order to it, among these, of some we are to have compassion, making a difference; others are to be saved with fear, plucking them out of the fire, awaken their consciences by the terrors of the law, and then allure them by the promises of the Gospel. Shew them their sin, set before them their duty, warn them of their danger, and beseech them to fly from the wrath to come, and to be reconciled to God; in a word, knowing the terror of the Lord, and constrained by his love, intreat, persuade, and even compel them to come in.

And as these are to be brought in, others are to be edified and built up. And here it is the minister's wisdom well to consider, what the condition of his hearers requires, and their capacities will allow; that he may distribute the bread of life accordingly, and so accommodate himself to the state of his hearers, that each one may have their portion. These are of several ranks, and under very different circumstances. The Apostle *John* speaks of *little children, young men, and fathers*; and he writes to them all, he has something to say to each of them, 1 *John* ii. 12, 13. Some are weak and ignorant like babes and children, these must be fed with milk; plain and obvious truths, like that food, which is easy of digestion. I have, says the Apostle, to these *Corinthians, fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, nor yet are you able, 1 Cor.* ii. 2. Others are strong, and these should be fed with *meat*, more solid and substantial food, that they may be carried on to perfection, and gradually trained up to a greater and more extensive degree of light and understanding in the things of God. *Strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, Heb. v. 14.* Tho' it should be far from us to neglect the plain and easy lessons of morality, yet we are not wholly to content our selves with these, but in dispensing the word, we are to give the greatest diligence to attend unto the more sublime and glorious mysteries of the Gospel; the person, offices
and

and grace of Jesus Christ, as those wherein the glory of God, and our own obedience are most eminently concerned. From plain and easy things, we should proceed to those that are more mature, and fit for Christians of a riper age, *Heb. vi. 1.*

Again, some are fluctuating and unstable; these wavering souls are to be settled and established; some wander and go astray; those are to be reduced and brought back again. The slothful and dull of hearing are to be stirred up and quickened to their duty, by the words of the masters of assemblies, which are *that* to the souls of men, which goads are to the sluggish animal. The backsliders and secure are to be threatened, that they may be awakened out of their slumber, being told they shall be filled with their own ways; if they live after the flesh they shall die; let them therefore consider whence they are fallen, repent and do their first works.

Some, again are bruised reeds and smoking flax; disconsolate souls, cast down and disquieted; weary and heavy laden, under a sense of guilt and sorrow; they are tempted or deserted; to these weary souls a word is to be spoke that is suited to their case, which tends to resolve their doubts, and comfort them under all their sorrows. On the other hand, some joy in the Lord, and are filled with the consolations of God; these are to be cautioned against high-mindedness, and bid to rejoice with trembling.

Thus to speak to all parts of the word, and all sorts of persons, doctrines, precepts, promises, threatnings, for conviction and comfort, to saints and sinners, weak and strong, giving every one their portion, as their capacities will allow, and their circumstances require, this is to divide the word aright.

IV. To handle the word rightly, is, to deliver the truths thereof in their proper time and season. God hath made every thing beautiful in its time; and to every thing there is a season. Cold is seasonable in Winter, as heat is in summer; and either of these in any

considerable degree in the different times we reckon unseasonable, as snow in summer, and rain in harvest, *Prov. xxvi. 1.*

Some truths are never out of season, but some things are more proper for one season than another. Every truth is not fit for every time, nor will it suit all occasions. Now that is *rightly* spoke, that is *seasonably* spoke. Many a good word comes short of doing the good it might have done for want of being well timed; whereas *a word in season how good is it?* *Prov. xv. 23.* How much good does it do? counsel or comfort given in the fit time is highly acceptable and useful. There are many things good in themselves, but as *Hushai* said of *Achitophel's* counsel, they are not so good at such a time, or season; but *a word fitly spoken*, upon its wheels, that runs smoothly, hits the case, the time, the occasion and circumstances of persons and things, *is like apples of gold in pictures of silver*, as pleasing to the ear, as they were to the eye, *Prov. xxv. 11.* To give times and seasons unto especial truths and doctrines, is committed to his prudence, who is called to feed the Church of God. *Who then is that faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them their meat in due season?* *Matth. xxiv. 45.* He must have the tongue of the learned that knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. For the matter of it, what suits the case, and for the season of it, when it is proper and fit. *Isai. l. 4.*

To handle then the word aright, is to bring out of the treasure of Scripture those things that suit the present age in general, or any person's case in particular.

A respect herein is to be had to the present age, and so the errors of the day are to be confuted, and the present truths, such as are more especially struck at, are to be contended for and vindicated. To declaim against old error and antiquated heresies, long since buried in the grave of silence, is to fight with ghosts, and challenge the dead. This is to amuse and confound people with

with things they would else never have heard of, and better it would be they never had.

The sins also of the present times are to be exposed and reprov'd. There are some things seasonable in such a particular juncture, to such places and persons. The Apostle *Paul* shewed his great wisdom in observing this rule. *Athens* was a city wholly given to idolatry and superstition; you might as easily find an idol as a man, for they were full of idols. The Apostle coming amongst them suits his discourse to the place and people; *I perceive*, says he, *that in all things you are too superstitious*; and since they had an altar to the unknown God, *whom they ignorantly worship*, he would declare unto them, *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with mens hands: we ought not to think the Godhead is like to gold and silver, or stone graven by art and man's device*; with much more to this purpose, than which nothing could be more seasonable, considering the place where, and the people among whom he was at this time, *Acts xvii.* In like manner, when the Apostle was at *Ephesus*, we don't find he directly spoke against, and reviled their Goddess *Diana*. The town-clerk cleared him of this imputation, when he told the people, to appease them, *These men are not robbers of churches, nor blasphemers of your goddess*, *Acts xix. 37.* He did not upbraid them with their idolatry, nor rail against their beloved, adored *Diana*, that might have exasperated them, but as one that must declare the whole counsel of God; he preached the truth among them, and plainly told them, they were no Gods which were made by hands. Nor could the divine essence be represented by corporeal things, which was a word in season, suited to the place and people, *Acts xix. 26.*

A regard herein is also to be had to particular persons. The Apostle *Paul* shewed his great wisdom and skill in this also, when he was called to preach unto *Felix*, and his Wife *Drusilla*, they heard him concerning the

faith; but being well acquainted with their character, he lays hold of that opportunity, without naming the persons to reprove their vices: and he reasoned with them of righteousness and temperance, things they were most eminently defective in, and utter strangers to. He endeavours also to terrify and awaken their consciences, by the severe menaces of a judgment to come, when they and all men should be called to a strict account of all they had done in the body. These were necessary and seasonable truths, considering the persons he had then to deal with.

The word is also to be delivered, so as to suit particular occasions, providences and circumstances of time, &c. as fasting and prayer on such an occasion as this, that hath now brought us together; or thanksgiving for some national, or family, or personal mercies and deliverances. There are truths that suit the several ages of men, youth and elder persons. *Circumstances*; and these *outward*; such as plenty or poverty, prosperity and adversity: *inward*, occasioned by Satan's temptation, or divine desertions. Some things there are more especially suited to these; and he handles the word aright, that endeavours as much as may be, to fit his discourses hereunto.

V. To handle the word aright is, to deliver it in a proper manner, and in such a *way*, as becomes the holy and divine oracles. *If any man speak*, (it is the Apostle Peter's direction) *let him speak as becomes the oracles of God*, 1 Pet. iv. 2. He does not mean the outward gesture and manner of his delivery; (though some regard should be had to that too) but he intends the *matter* spoken, and then the *manner* of speaking; the oracles of God themselves for the *matter*, and as becomes them for the *manner*; that is, with great faithfulness, as those that dare not accommodate themselves to the humours, fancies, and passions of men, nor study to please them, for then they would not be the servants of Christ. With all plainness and clearness; not with the excellency of speech and enticing words
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of man's wisdom, neat and trim phrases, puerile flourishes, or high flown expressions. But then this is to be done with words of wisdom, that though we are rude in speech, the truth may not be exposed to contempt by any uncouth, and indecent expressions, which tempt people to despise what they ought to have in the highest veneration, and provoke them to laugh, at a time and in a place, where, of all things, our business is to make them serious; for we are to distinguish between a gawdry of phrases, and a decency of words. Again, to speak as the oracles of God is,

To speak intelligibly and condescendingly, that the meanest capacity may take in and understand what is said. Some persons, like canon mounted too high, shoot over peoples heads, get into the clouds and soar so high, that they lose their hearers, and perhaps themselves too. It is easy to amuse the vulgar with some abstruse speculations, and high flown notions, with an affected height of eloquence and learning, with swelling words of vanity, that have no fixed nor determinate ideas. These often admire what they really don't understand; but it is wrong to attempt it, since it only feeds a man's own vanity, and gratifies the people's itching ears, but will never savingly profit them.

To conclude this head, to handle the word aright is, to deliver it with that warmth, holy zeal and fervor, that gravity and seriousness, that meekness and gentleness, and yet with that boldness and authority, with such evidence and demonstration, as every way becomes the sacred oracles,

I come now in the next place

Secondly, To give the reasons of this, and shew why it ought to be the care of those that divide the word, to do it aright.

I. The first reason is taken from the word itself, which is to be divided. There ought to be this care, because it is that which God himself is the author of, and hath a peculiar interest in. This word of truth

is the word of God : it comes from the love, the kindness and wisdom of God ; it is a revelation of the mind and will of God ; it is a dispensation of the grace and favour of God ; it is an act of the Father's supreme sovereign authority, and justly claims our highest reverence. We ought to shew a great regard to it, and be very careful in the handling it. Should we corrupt this word, dash it, mingle with it our own inventions, pride, passions, wrest and pervert it, so as to make it serve our own purposes ; should we discern and mutilate it ; should we in these, or any other criminal instances, handle it deceitfully ; what must we be liable to, when we consider whose word it is, and the strict regards that are owing to it ? This had a great influence upon the Apostle in the exercise of his ministry ; and no small comfort was it to him, to be able to say as he doth, *We are not as many who corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity ; but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ*, 2 Cor. xi. 17. And again, *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending our selves to every man's conscience*, 2 Cor. iv. 2. If any did corrupt the word of God, and handle it deceitfully, he never could come into their measures, but approved himself faithful to him whose word it was, and who had put him in trust with the Gospel.

II. Another reason is taken from the persons among whom the word is to be divided ; it ought to be done aright, because this is the most likely way to answer the end of the ministry upon the souls of men. When the word is so divided, that sometimes one sort of food is cut out, and sometimes another, the whole household will then be served, and every one have his proper portion, which is the duty, and will be the satisfaction of every faithful steward. We then reach every person, and as near as may be every case, not always feeding one sort of hearers, whilst others are neglected and starved. We are not always to dwell upon

one theme, as if all men had the same taste and relish, or the same capacities and apprehensions, and there were not a variety of cases to be considered by us, as there is a diversity of gifts for that end bestowed by Christ. All sorts of food are not alike to all men: that may be very agreeable to one, which is not so another. Some are pleased with the rousing awakening words of a *Boanerges*, when others are more taken with the soft and gentle streins of a *Barnabas*. Nothing works upon them, and insinuates itself into their minds, like the soft streins of the Gospel, the love of Christ, and the mercy of God. Some like a rhetorical way of preaching, which strikes their passions, and warms their affections, when others are better pleased with a logical, rational and argumentative way, as that which informs their judgment, and enlarges their understanding. Now when the word is rightly divided, all these are likely to be served. Where the design rises no higher than to reach the affections, without informing the judgment, and possessing the mind with a due sense of the weight and reason of things, it mostly proves evanid: and much zeal and heat, with little knowledge, will make very uncomfortable members of a religious society: on the other hand, when our endeavour is not only to speak to the passions of men, and get into their affections, but to let light into their understandings, they become not only warm and lively, but intelligent, judicious christians, to the great comfort of those ministers, by whom they are taught, and benefit of the society to which they belong. When doctrinal truths are clearly unfolded to the understanding, and closely applied to the conscience, that all may be reduced to practice, the word is rightly divided, and most likely to obtain its end on those that hear it.

III. Another argument may be taken from the ministers themselves. It should be their care to divide the word aright, because

1.) Hereby they *shew themselves workmen. Study to shew thy self a workman: one that understands his business,*

finest, that can turn his hand to any part of his work, is diligent in it, and performs it well, as it should be done; not as those, who not being masters of their business, go awkwardly about it, make bungling work of it, and do it by halves, but workman like. And how will they shew themselves workmen, but by rightly dividing the word of truth? By this it appears they are workmen indeed, men of skill and dexterity in their sacred calling; and then,

2.) *They need not be ashamed.* He that understands his business, applies himself to it, and minds it, is neither unskilful nor unfaithful in it, is like a good workman, that needs not be ashamed of his work when it is done, it rather redounds to his honour. Indeed the best and most skilful have too much cause to be ashamed before God, and deeply humbled upon the account of their manifold imperfections; they blush to think how defective they are, even in their best performances; and yet they will not be ashamed, when they rightly divide the word, as if they were persons wholly unfit for their work, altogether unskilful and unfaithful, or slothful and careless in it, not regarding how it is done; such would indeed have cause to be ashamed, when he that rightly divides the word need not be so.

3.) *Hereby they approve themselves to God,* which is the highest our ambition should carry us. Some labour to gain mens applause, by well turned and elegant periods, a pointed satyr, or profound reasoning; but God's *euge* is better than their *hum*; therefore says the Apostle, *We labour whether present or absent to be accepted of God,* 2 Cor. v. 9. to have him say, *Well done thou good and faithful servant.* He may approve of and accept our labours, though others, it may be, despise both them and us. And then, as a farther reason,

4.) *They will be clear of the blood of all men.* This will yield them no small comfort upon the review of their work, that though it is far from being perfect
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and compleat, they have been helped so to discharge their duty, as not to bring the blood of perishing souls upon their own heads. So it was to the Apostle, as you see in that appeal he made to the elders of *Ephesus*, when taking his leave of them; *wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.* If any of them perish, their blood is upon their own head; it don't lie at my door; none of them perish through my default; I have delivered my own soul, for I have so divided the word, as to keep back nothing that was profitable; *nor have I shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God,* Acts xx. 26, 27. Happy the man, thrice happy the minister, that so divides the word of truth, as to shew himself a workman; that has no need to be ashamed; that approves himself to God, and is pure from the blood of all men.

Thirdly, As an improvement of what has been said, I shall now address my self in a few things both to *ministers* and *people*.

I. To *ministers*. This shews us the greatness and difficulty of the ministerial work. It is not so easy a thing, as some do imagine, to divide the word aright; on the contrary, it is a work of great nicety and exactness, as is plain, if we consider the many things we are to run through, the various cases we are to suit, and the different persons that are to be served. How hard a province is this? who is sufficient for it? he had need be a skilful workman, that is to divide the word so, as to give every person their proper portion, conviction and comfort, to whom they respectively belong, and to give this meat in due season; that having opened a wound, knows how and when it is fit to pour in oil to heal it. And then so to divide the word as to give every *truth* its due *weight*, to avoid all extremes, and sail so skilfully between them, as not to make shipwreck of the truth. Who is that wise and faithful servant! it is an easy thing to do this work in

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a superficial manner, slightly and perfunctorily, but to do it workman like, is arduous and difficult.

With regard to it, I would observe more particularly, this is a work, that hath its spring in the authority, wisdom, and grace of God himself. A dispensation of his favour and mercy is therein committed to us.

It is a work of the greatest importance to the souls of men.

It is that also of which we must give account at the great day.

It is a work that requires much skill and wisdom, great diligence and application.

It must then be a work, to which of our selves we are by no means equal.

But then, lest all this should dishearten us, I add,

It is a work, wherein we may look for, and expect all needful encouragement from Christ. His special presence; *Lo I am with you always, to the end of the world*, Matt. xxviii. 20. His gracious assistance, support, acceptance and success, and in the end a glorious recompence.

It is our great comfort we don't bear this burden alone.

It was *Judah's* complaint, I only allude to it; *The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed*, Neh. iv. 10. This was the discouragement which the builders then lay under, and it is our complaint now. Our hands are weakened this day! our strength fails! our numbers lessen! we are weak by the removing so many active leading men, standard-bearers in their day; that were as he-goats before the flock; but let not this discourage us; does Christ fail, is he discouraged? if not, why should we? *Isa. xlii. 4. He shall not fail, nor be discouraged.*

Let us not therefore be discouraged, by the difficulty of the work; our own insufficiency for it; the opposition of enemies; the flights and neglects of friends; the failing of the burden-bearers by sickness or death,

but be strong and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. God will provide : he hath now done so for you of this congregation, and may the Lord abundantly bless the provision he hath made for his *Zion* here.

2. To the *people*. Do any ask what does the ministers work or duty concern us? what is all this to us? I answer much every way. And to make this appear, shall I be allowed, my friends, to offer some things to those, for whose sake all this care is to be exercised? in doing which, I shall use that freedom which I think becomes me, however it may be taken by some. Though it should displease, I shall have the satisfaction of having discharged my conscience, and delivered my own soul; for I seek not to please men.

In the general then, if ministers are concerned to divide the word aright, how much are you concerned to hear and receive it aright? with what care then, with what reverence and godly fear ought you to attend upon it?

How conversant ought you to be in, and with all the ordinances of worship which God hath appointed? with what diligence should you stir up the various powers and faculties of your souls, that you may be able to conceive aright of, and apprehend the things that are delivered unto you from time to time?

With what readiness of mind and subjection of soul should you receive those truths that are propounded to you? since without this, whatever care is taken by others to divide the word aright, to you it is all lost, and of none effect.

But what I aim at more especially, are the following particulars, which will conclude this discourse.

1. Then suffer your ministers to divide the word aright; don't hinder them in the doing that which is so much their duty. If you ask, how can we hinder them herein? I answer, various ways you either do it, or go about to do it. For instance,

By being displeased with, and offended at their faithfulness in declaring the whole counsel of God, you

hinder them, as far as in you lies. The time will come, says the Apostle, when men will not endure sound doctrine. They call some truths hard sayings, and ask who can hear them? *John vi. 60, 66.*

Others can't bear home close preaching; they must be touched with a gentle hand; you must prophesy very smooth things to them, or they will fly in your face,

And some can't bear any thing but what is just to their own mind. If the law be preached, though for Gospel *ends*; if duties are pressed, though from Gospel *principles*, some may be so weak as to cry out against this, and condemn it as legal preaching. And on the other hand, when the eternal, sovereign, unconditional love and grace of God is insisted on, others may be ready to quarrel with it as a libertine doctrine, that leads men to sin, though the whole drift and design of it is to bring them to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts.

These, says one of practical preaching, are good honest things, plain and common, obvious to every ones capacity: of another sort of preaching, say some, this may stir the affections, but will never inform the judgment; it may make men warm and zealous, but leaves them *weak* and *ignorant*; as for themselves, being persons of superior and more elevated understandings, they like none but sublime preachers, that entertain them with matters of deep speculation, the profound mysteries of the Gospel, and abstruser points of Christianity; when these very things some others may dislike, are not at all affected with, nor edified by, because indeed what they don't understand.

When all this, perhaps, is just as it should be, the whole counsel of God must be declared; nothing ought to be kept back, that is profitable to be known; it is God's will, that every truth have its weight, and every person their portion. He will have none fed, to the utter neglect of others; and consider, what don't edify you may profit another; the things *you* don't re-
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lish may be very agreeable to another man's taste ; though *you* don't like them, *he* may.

Again, you may hinder them herein, by your *sloth* and *non-proficiency* under the word. *And I, brethren*, says the Apostle to the *Corinthians*, *could not speak to you as unto spiritual* i. e. Christians that had made any great proficiency in the ways of God, and arrived to any just degrees of perfection. *But as unto carnal*, not to grown men, but *babes*, and was therefore obliged to *feed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it ; neither yet are ye able*, 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. And to the same purpose he speaks, *Heb. v. 11, &c.* *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

By such things as these you may hinder ministers from doing their duty, therefore watch against them, and allow them to begin with some, and lay the foundation ; convince and awaken men to repentance, in order to their conversion ; and having so done, then to go on with the building, and carry you from the first principles of the oracles of God, to the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, which will make you more perfect in knowledge. Suffer them to divide the word aright ; it is laid upon them as their duty ; they are obliged to do it ; they *must*, and if they are faithful *will* do it, whether herein they please men or no ; they can't else approve themselves to God, nor be pure from your blood ; they would not else be workmen ; not good workmen ; they would else be ashamed, as not having done their work well, therefore don't hinder them in the doing it ; let not their faithfulness herein be evil thought, or spoken of by you ; don't condemn all preaching that is not just to your taste and liking.

2. Be content in dividing the word, that others be served as well as your selves. The word *should* be so divided, that every one may have his portion : be willing then it should be so. Engross not all to your selves,

selves, as if none were to be served but you ; all can't be spoke to at once ; have patience then while others are served. Let saints sit contentedly sometimes to hear sinners threatened and awakened ; and sinners hear the saints comforted ; weak ones should let the strong have *meat*, and the strong allow those that are weak to have *milk*.

3. Make some good use of, and improve even those things that more properly belong to others : study and learn this holy art and skill. Some think nothing worth their hearing that don't just suit their own case ; and how shall such be gratified, when there are almost as many minds and cases as persons. Some are for terror, others for comfort ; some more for doctrine, and others for duty ; some for that which moves their affections, others for that which serves to inform their judgments, and if they don't meet with what exactly suits them, are apt to be offended, and ready to ask what is all this to me ; I had as good have stayed at home : but there is no truth that does not concern thee whoever thou art, and which if it is not thy own fault, thou mayest not make some good use of.

If thou art called into the fellowship of the Gospel, and hearest sinners spoke to in a way of terror for their conviction ; if their danger and misery be set before them ; if these are threatened with death, wrath and condemnation ; make a good use of this, and take occasion from hence to adore that grace which hath delivered you from all this misery ; such a one was I in time past ; it is owing to the rich, free and sovereign grace of God I am not so still.

If on the other hand, sinners hear the good man's blessedness and privileges opened, let them take occasion from hence to bewail their own misery, who are strangers to all this happiness, and hitherto have no lot nor portion in this matter : let this make them restless in their present state of sin and misery, and earnestly desirous to share the glorious privileges others are partakers of.

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When babes and children are spoke to and fed with milk, let the strong and more advanced believer improve what is said to these weak and feeblers christians. Well! I remember the time when I was such a one myself; a meer novice in religion; what thanks do I owe to God, that I am not so still, but in some good measure have out-grown my former childishness, and need no longer milk, but can digest and feed upon stronger meat; though after all, I am far from having attained, and have nothing to boast of? and when the weak hear those things, which are more fitted to the strong, let this provoke them to aspire after the like attainments; shame their sloth and slender progress in religion; when I see and hear what others have attained, it shews what I ought to be, and perhaps might have been long since, had I not been slothful and careless, but press'd after the like attainments. This is our duty, and will be our wisdom, since the word is to be so divided, to fetch in and gather up something that may be for our own advantage, even from those truths that more directly point at others, and do not so immediately concern our selves.

4. In this daily distribution let every one take his own portion. Rightly to divide the word, is to *give* every one his portion, and rightly to hear the word, is to *take* every one his portion. Terror to whom terror belongs, and comfort to whom comfort belongs, and not on the contrary, which yet is too common a case, so that the sinner and hypocrite snatches the saints comfort, and sincere souls fall under the hypocrites terror; concluding, all that is said for the detecting and awakening the former, is meant of, and belongs to himself. God so orders it in the distribution of spiritual food, that there should be suitable provision for every one, and we had need be very careful in this matter, to understand what belongs to us, and accordingly take and apply the word to our selves. It will be our wisdom, as it is our duty and interest, not to misapply the word, and take that to our selves, which

which belongs to another, and refuse that which properly belongs to us.

5. Receive divine truths, according to their nature and importance. Learn from hence to lay the stress where it ought to be laid. Some things are essential to salvation, and of indispensable necessity. *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God; without faith it is impossible to please God. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. They that are in the flesh cannot please God;* so that we must be born again, and become new creatures; there is a necessity of it; these are the things on which the Scriptures have laid the great stress, and so ought we. Other things are not to be neglected; but these are more especially to be regarded. Let us then watch against a false zeal, which is unevenly carried out towards things of a much inferior nature, while those of far more importance are too much neglected. This was what our Saviour so severely reprov'd and condemn'd in the Pharisees. Their enlarged phylacteries shew'd them greatly concerned to have God's laws seen in their foreheads, when they had little care to have them written in their hearts. They would by no means eat with unwashen hands, lest they should transgress the tradition of the elders, while they took no care to have their natures changed, and their hearts purified by renewing grace, but lived under the power of corrupt nature, in a direct contempt of the commands of God. They were very exact and punctual to a tittle, in observing some external rites and customs, as the *Jews* before them had been very inquisitive about times, days and months, *Zech. vi. 2, 7.* They abounded in these ritual observances, things of a more minute concernment, while the much more substantial duties of religion were grossly neglected, and abstained from some things which God did not forbid them, rather than from those practices which he had expressly interdicted. They tithed mint, anise and cummin, when they

they neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith; they strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel; made clean the outside of the cup, but within were full of extortion and excess, *Matth. xxiii. 23, 24, 25.* This is the certain note and ordinary guise of hypocrites; but the right handling the word is a direction to us in this matter; *that* teaches us to lay the stress upon things of the greatest necessity and importance, and to be less solicitous about things of an indifferent nature.

To conclude; when the word is rightly divided and heard, so as to give and take every one his portion; when the stress is laid both by speaker and hearers where it ought to be, and a regard is paid to all truths according to their weight and importance, so that we are comparatively little solicitous about the lower and meaner things in religion, and principally concern'd about the essentials of christianity, then is the word rightly received as well as divided, to the great comfort both of ministers and people, and the honour of him whose word it is, to whom be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen.





S E R M O N II.

O N

I COR. iii. 6.

*I have planted, Apollos watered, but
God gave the increase.*



CORINTH was one of the most infamous places for all sorts of wickedness and impiety in the then *heathen* world; and yet out of this city, did God by the ministry of his servant *Paul*, gather a church to himself, upon many accounts, one of the most eminent and considerable in the *christian* world. This is evident, from the many good things the Apostle says of them, That *in every thing they were enriched in all utterance, and in all knowledge, so that they came behind in no gift*, 1 Cor. i. 5, 7. *They abounded in every thing (that was good) in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all diligence and in love*, 2 Cor. viii. 7. and yet they were far from being that perfect church they would be thought to be. There were many things among them which

which deserved reproof, and needed correction. If some of them were persons of extraordinary and uncommon attainments, the knowledge they had puffed them up, and swelled them with pride, made them wanton and factious, bred in them a fond conceit of themselves, and too great a contempt of others. *Now ye are full; now ye are rich; now you reign as kings, 1 Cor. iv. 8, 10. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise.* And if some among them were persons that had a good measure of knowledge, others of them were babes and children in understanding. They had some very weak, childish persons and things among them, and which was worse, there was a great deal of carnality which discovered itself, so that the Apostle tells them, *I could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ, 1 Cor. iii. 1, 3.* How high soever they were in parts and gifts, they fell short, and were very defective in the exercise of many graces, as appears by those unnatural unchristian digladiations, and fierce contentions, those strifes and envyings that were amongst them, to the great scandal of christianity; upon the account of which, the Apostle appeals to them, themselves being judges, whether they were not carnal, and did not walk more like men than christians, especially of their attainments. And this discovered itself particularly in their conduct towards their ministers; some they cried up, and others they did as much run down. They e'en idolized some, and made little Gods of them, while they nullified others, and made nothing of them; so partial and unequal were they in their respects to them. They divided about three of the best preachers that ever lived upon earth. One gloried that he was of *Paul*, another that he was of *Apollon*; and a third that he was of *Cephas*, 1 Cor. i. 12. These contentions and running into parties, were great evidences of their carnality. The Apostle therefore chides and reproves them for these things, as childish, and sets himself to cure the

distemper. Every one must have his *Paul*, his *Apollos*, his *Cephas*; no body else will go down with them. Pray, says the Apostle, *who is Paul?* and *who is Apollos?* were you baptized into their names? are these authors of your faith? are any of them more than ministers by whom you believed? *I indeed planted you, and Apollos watered you*; but if ever either he or I did you any good, it is owing to God, for he gave the increase. So that neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth any thing, whatever you make of them. Neither the one nor the other is any thing of himself; all of them put together are nothing in the work of salvation without God; thus humbly, thus diminutively he speaks of himself, as well as *Apollos*. *And these things*, which I have now been speaking of about your partiality toward your ministers, in over-valuing some, and under-rating others, *I have transferred in a figure to my self, and Apollos for your sakes, that you might learn in us not to think of men, above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up, for one against another, 1 Cor. iv. 6.* The sense of which is generally thought to be, that the Apostle conceals the names of those ambitious teachers about whom they really were divided, and substitutes his own, and that of *Apollos* in their room; as it were to take their disgrace upon themselves. To avoid every thing that might provoke and exasperate, he makes himself and *Apollos* figures or types of those he intended, as if that agreed to them, which was only true of others; and he really meant others, when he named themselves; not as if they had set up him, or *Apollos* in this factious way, but under their names he represents how they acted towards others. But this is an interpretation, there are some that do by no means fall in with; nor is there, as they apprehend, the least footstep of a reason for it. The Apostle does not here reprove any false teachers; nor was there any mention made of them before; but he reproves the people

people themselves, who said, *I am of Paul*, &c. He don't say, I have transferred these things for *their* sakes, but for *your* sakes, that *you* might learn in us, not to think of men above that which is written, that you might not set a higher rate upon any of your teachers, than what is meet, nor value your selves upon your relation to, or dependance upon one minister more than another, though it were my self, or *Apollos*. And then the plain meaning is, he had used so low and humble a metaphor, as that of a husbandman's, or gardiner's planting and watering, to give them an example of humility, that they might not think any preachers of the Gospel to be more than stewards, ministers, and instruments, nor be puffed up one against another, for this or that teacher, or boast of their being the admirers and followers of such a one; for even I my self am but a planter, and *Apollos* one that watereth; it is God that gives all the increase.

From which words I observe,

Obs. 1. There are some persons, whose more especial and appropriate business it is, to begin and carry on the work of God in the souls of men. It is here supposed, that there should be such a thing as planting and watering, in order to an increase; and there must be some proper hand to do this. *God hath*, says the Apostle, *committed to us the ministry of reconciliation*. He makes use of the ministry of some men, to save the souls of others. When he designed the conversion of *Cornelius* and his house, he sends an Angel, not to preach to him; he must not receive the Gospel from his hand, but to bid him send for *Peter*, who should tell him what he ought to do, Acts x. 5. God had much people in *Corinth*, and if he had so pleased, could have called them immediately himself, or sent an angel to them, but he rather makes use of the ministry of man, and therefore sends *Paul* to plant them, and *Apollos* to water them. Of his own will he be-
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gets us, but it is by the word of truth, and ordinarily by the ministry of that word, wherein the goodness and wisdom of God is evidently seen, however it be despised by some as a needless and foolish institution; and it ought to be a great thing in our eye, as it is such a standing testimony to the kindness of God, and shews how willing he is men should come to the knowledge of the truth.

Obs. 2. God furnishes those whom he thus employs, with a variety of gifts, and these in very different degrees, for the carrying on this work and design of his in the world. Some persons by the special ordination, and at the pleasure of God, are designed for planting, and others for watering. *I have planted you, and Apollos watered you.* This is not a mere figurative representation, but a matter of fact. God said to *Paul* in a vision, *I have much people in this city, Acts xviii. 10.* Lord, might he have thought a people in *Corinth*! one of the most infamous places in the world? yes, says God, in this city, as lewd as it is, I have much people, many that belong to the election of grace. Some of God's people may lye in places, where we least expect to find them. Thither therefore *Paul* is sent to gather in this people. It is good labouring, where there is like to be a large harvest. *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and went to Corinth, Acts xviii. 1.* He was sent to break ground, and begin a good work among them. He first preached the Gospel to them, and sowed the good seed of the word in that city: he laid the foundation of a christian church there, and converted them to the faith, *Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized, ver. 8.* This work he was more especially designed and fitted for; I have planted.

Then comes another, and he waters what the former had planted; and this was *Apollos*, a man eminently fitted

ted for that work. *Paul* was to bring those in that were without, and *Apollos* to build those up that were brought in. He was disposed to pass into *Achaia*, God having inclined his mind that way; and the brethren wrote to the disciples that were at *Corinth*, exhorting them to receive him, *Acts* xviii. 27. xix. 1. They at *Ephesus* had a great loss in being deprived of his labours, but did not grudge the disciples in *Achaia*, and particularly at *Corinth*, the benefit of them, but approved his purpose of going thither, and recommended both him and his labours unto them; for though the churches are many in themselves, they are one in Christ. *Paul* had set the wheel a going at *Corinth*; many were stirred up and prevailed upon by his preaching to embrace the faith; these young converts needed to be confirmed and carried on in religion, but after a stay of near two years he must leave them, being called to the same work elsewhere. In this vacancy there was a fair occasion for *Apollos* to step in and water, what the other had planted; and it is said, *He helped them much who had believed through grace*, ver. 27. One had begun a good work, the other carried it on. *Paul* was their father, as he tells them, *Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers; but I have begotten you through the Gospel*, 1 *Cor.* iv. 15. They were made christians by his ministry; he was the great instrument of their new birth, and so was their spiritual father, and they his beloved sons. *Apollos* was their nursing father; he, as it were, brought them up, confirmed and established them, so that they were both in their way excellent ministers, and of eminent service in the church of God, one to plant, and the other to water.

Obs. 3. All that these can do, whatever their gifts are, is to plant and water. They are, at best, but instrumental means, not efficient causes of mens believing;

ing; no authors of their faith, only ministers by whom they believe. *The words of the wise*, says Solomon, *are as goads and as nails fastned by the masters of assemblies*, i. e. prophets, pastors, teachers, ministers, and holy men of God; their words are as goads to the ox, as they prick forward that dull and sluggish animal, and make him mend his pace, so these excite and stir us up to our duty, when we are slothful and remiss; and as nails are fastned in a sure place, these are designed to fix persons in that which is good, when they are wavering and uncertain. These nails are said to be fastned by the masters of assemblies; which tells us, there have been and must be assemblies for religious worship; that these were of antient date and a divine institution, for the honour of God, and the good of mankind. That there are masters of these assemblies, not to lord it over them, but to lead and guide them, to go in and out before them, to preside among them, to be God's mouth to them, and their mouth to God; these are to fasten the word in a sure place, and drive it as a nail to the head. But God has not laid it upon them to do this of themselves, and by any power of their own. These masters are given by one shepherd, and he that gives them must prosper them; or the truths and words themselves, which are as goads and nails, are given by one shepherd, and he whose words they are must give them their virtue, or the wisest and best furnished masters will never be able to fasten them in a sure place, or drive the nails to the head, *Eccles. xii. 11.* They can but plant and water.

God never put more upon them than this. He don't require the success and increase at their hands; he never laid it upon them as conditions of their acceptance and reward, that they should of themselves convert sinners to him, and persuade men to be reconciled, any farther than as instruments.

Nor is it in their power to do more than this. There is not strength sufficient in any human arm to fasten these nails in the hearts of men. It is not within the compass of any created power to turn one sinner to God. Were angels themselves to be constant preachers in our assemblies, they could not with all their heavenly eloquence convert a soul; nor they that talk ever so much like angels; not *Paul* with all his learning and fervor, nor *Apollos*, though so eloquent and suasive, all that they can do is to plant and water, they could not of themselves give any increase.

Obs. 4. The success of the ministry altogether depends upon, and is entirely owing to the blessing of God. *Paul's* planting, and *Apollos* watering, would never come to any thing, if God did not give the increase; all the success of their labour is owing to him. Diligence and faithfulness belongs to us, but success to God. When the Apostle therefore was to plant at *Corinth*, God says to him, fear not, I am with thee, to secure thee against the rage of thine enemies, and to assist and succeed thee in the discharge of thy duty, that thou mayest not labour in vain. *As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth, it shall not return to me void, but accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it, Isai. lv. 10, 11.* And no wonder, since God hath an immediate access to the spirits of men, and their hearts are all in his hands, to turn them as the rivers of water. He works upon the mind, and enlightens the understanding; sends the word armed with his own power, in the day whereof he makes a willing people; after which he gives the vigour of grace to grow up in faith and holiness, which is intended by his giving the increase.

The improvement of what hath been said, to which I now proceed, will give us a fair occasion for some following *inferences* and *directions*.

Inf. 1. It is a great instance of divine goodness, and a singular mercy to a people, when God sends ministers to plant and water them. Little do we consider, what a treasure is committed to us in the ministry and ordinances of the Gospel. It is an invaluable blessing, wherever it is vouchsafed.. As such the Psalmist speaks of it, when he says, *He hath shewed his word unto Jacob, and his judgments to Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation*, Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. Such it was to *Corinth*, whither God first sent the Apostle *Paul* to begin, and then *Apollos* to carry on a good work among them.

Ministers are and must be called off their service; there is a limited duration, within the compass of which their work lies; they must not always labour and never rest. You have lately had an instance of this among your selves; being deprived of one by death, that planted and watered you, and to whose labours among you, God gave a more than ordinary success. It is your mercy under this afflicting providence, that God hath now given you another pastor, and I trust, one after his and your heart to enter upon the labours of the former, to plant some anew, and water what was planted before. To have such ministerial labours bestowed upon us, to plough up the fallow ground, throw in the seed, and water it when that is done, is an act of the meer grace of God, and a singular mercy to any people.

Inf. 2. This tells us the painfulness and labour of the ministerial work. It is an office that calls men to plant and water, and that without ceasing; this is labour even to weariness. The Apostle at one time talks of it in the style of a *builder*. *Ye are God's build-*
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ing, 1 Cor. iii. 9. and according to the grace of God given me, I as a wise master builder have laid the foundation. There are others, whose work it is to build upon this foundation; this being well and carefully laid, the superstructure must be carried on with all diligence, only let him that builds upon this foundation, take heed what he lays thereon, and see that it be gold, silver, and precious stones; not wood, hay and stubble. The text leads us to another allusion, and that is, the husbandman's calling. *Ye are God's husbandry*; and ministers are as his husbandmen. The former metaphor shews, that the work of the ministry requires a good degree of skill and understanding, lest we be foolish builders; the latter tells us, what labour and pains it requires. The husbandman's is a painful laborious calling; there is no room for sloth and idleness; he must either be ploughing, or sowing, or reaping, ever planting, or watering; his life is a constant toil: this shews the painfulness and labour of the work. Christ's ministers are to take pains not to take state upon them.

Inf. 3. This leads us to reflect upon our own insufficiency, and from thence to see the necessity of an entire dependance upon God's assistance and blessing. Is this the work to which we are called? so difficult, so laborious! how natural then is such a reflection? who is sufficient for it? where is the skill, the wisdom, and furniture necessary hereunto? the best qualified and most able ministers, will have, and ought to have, a just sense of their own insufficiency, and not go forth to their work, (which yet we are too prone to do) in the strength of their own gifts and preparations, but with a dependance upon God for his presence and blessing. *Paul and Apollos* could do nothing without God. Who then are we? and what can we do of our selves? you, my good brother, ought to enter upon your work in this place, deeply sensible hereof.

Inf. 4. This administers occasion for great thoughtfulness, and solicitude of mind, as to what has been, or will be the success of our labours. The husbandman's is a careful, as well as a laborious and painful calling. He ploughs, he sows, he plants and waters, and all this in hope, but not without fear. He is often full of care, and hath many thoughts what harvest he shall reap, whether he shall receive his seed with advantage, and enjoy the fruit of all his labour; he knows not which shall prosper, his morning or evening seed; this, or that, both alike, or neither. This is applicable to spiritual husbandmen; they plant and water in hope, but with much fear. They sow their seed in the morning, and in the evening do not withhold their hands, not knowing whether this or that shall prosper, and not without some fear and trembling, lest all this, as to many at least, should be in vain. *I was*, says the Apostle to these Corinthians, *with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling*, 1 Cor. ii. 3. He trembles at the thought of a fruitless ministry. Though he was told, God had much people in that city, and he was sent thither on purpose to gather them in; and tho' he took the most likely way to have his ministry rendered effectual; for says he, *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit, and of power*, &c. 4. Yet he tells them, *I was with you in weakness and in fear, &c.* lest after all he should mismanage his trust, and any thing on his part should hinder the success of the Gospel, and obstruct the course of his ministry, so that as to many of them he should labour in vain, and spend his strength for nought. None know the fears and trembling of poor ministers; they are conscious to themselves of their own weakness and insufficiency; sensible that all their suc-
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cess depends upon the divine pleasure and blessing, and can't be without their fears, lest by any false steps and misconduct of theirs, God should be provoked to leave them to themselves, and with-hold that so necessary a blessing; so that they should not profit the people at all, nor see any increase of their planting and watering, but all their time and pains should be lost, and to no saving purpose: this, of all things, would be grievous and afflicting to them. Sad it would be to plant and water, and nothing come of it. Such an account from those that watch for souls, could not be given up to God, but with the utmost grief, *Heb. xiii.* They are fearful for themselves, knowing how insufficient they are; jealous over souls with a godly jealousy, knowing how precious they are, and in what danger of being lost. There are great thoughts of heart, for what God sends them to such a people; will he go with us, when we go forth to plant and water? shall we come to them in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel? will God honour us so far as to make us instruments of good to the souls of those among whom we labour? will God give the increase? shall I see the fruit of my labour? or will it be in vain? am I employed, where he would have me to be? can I reasonably expect and hope for his blessing? for want of this, how many prayers and sermons are lost? and what numbers of souls perish? God in righteous judgment with-holds the blessing; his special saving power is not put forth; his arm is not revealed; reports then are not believed; and the word which was designed for life, proves a favour of death unto death, and they are with a people in fear and much trembling, lest this should be the case.

Inf. 5. Then we should not be partially addicted to, and fond of any one minister, to the despising of others. This was the fault, which the Apostle here

sets himself to correct. One said, I am of *Paul*, his follower and admirer: he is a deep, sublime, evangelical preacher; warm and zealous in the defence of the Gospel; a great asserter of its doctrines; one that reasons strongly and clearly. Profound *Paul*! I care to hear no other; there is none like him. Another said, I am of *Apollos*; he is a man fervent in Spirit, and mighty in the Scriptures, *Acts* xix. 24, 25. full of divine light and heat, of divine knowledge and affection; he preaches as one in earnest, and whose heart is in his work; he is moreover an eloquent man, a master of language, one that has a great command of words, a fine orator, a charming preacher, having a tuneable voice, and a most agreeable delivery; his tongue is tipp'd with silver, he speaks like an orator, yea an oracle, fully, fluently, pertinently, having words at will; he has a most pleasing, powerful, convincing way of talking; I am therefore for *Apollos*. So among us, instead of being thankful for that large supply of ministers we are blessed with, and the endowments of them all in their way, and endeavouring to reap advantage from their mutual labours, we vainly glory in men, set them up above, and even against one another, and run into parties for their sakes. I am for such a one, his tongue is well hung, his language fine, and his delivery graceful; he talks off hand, and without book; or for such a man, he talks profoundly, reasons closely, demonstrates clearly, handles an argument well; or for such a one, he interprets solidly, and then applies with great warmth and affection, comes home and close to the conscience; or for another, because he confutes error with great zeal and judgment, contends earnestly for the faith, is valiant for the truth, and zealous in God's cause, when others are cold and lukewarm; he is a stanch, orthodox man, and heartily subscribes to the truth. I am for none but such men as these. Well, says another, I don't like these angry, hot men; they have
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too much fire for me; I am for men that have more temper and moderation, that assert their christian liberty, and wont be imposed upon by others; I don't like him the worse, but the better for refusing what they would require of him, who had no authority to do it, and indeed don't much care to hear any others.

I would not be thought by all this to suppose, that one minister may not be justly preferred to another. God puts greater honour upon some than others; he bestows upon them more eminent gifts, makes them taller by the head and shoulders than many of their brethren, vouchsafes to them more abundant measures of his spirit, and gives much greater success to their labours, than to many others. It is past doubt also, that persons may have a more particular affection and respect for some ministers than others, and be allowed to have them higher in their esteem and value. Their gifts are more accommodated and fitted to their taste and genius; or they have been made of greater use to them than any others; they have many instructors, but these have been their fathers; they have begotten them again through the Gospel, which endears to them their persons and ministry, and they must be allowed to have a superior respect to these. Such a preferring one to another, will be unavoidable in such a city as this, where there is so great a variety of gifts. And indeed, it is well for us it is so, that all are not for one man, or one sort of preaching; as it is our happiness there is such a diversity of gifts from one and the same spirit, for different tastes and attainments. The fault then here reprov'd, is the so preferring one, as to neglect and despise others, when the abilities of some are cried up to the contempt of others; when you are puffed up for one against another, magnify one and vilify another. This evil proceeds farther, and has very bad effects; minister is oppos'd to minister, which might set them at variance, and breed mutual emulation, as rivals and competitors

petitors for the people's favour, which would produce anger, strife and contention; so liable are the best things in the world to be corrupted through the lusts of men.

This was the fault the Apostle found with them, and the thing he blamed them for, their having mens persons so much in admiration; this shewed they were carnal, very carnal, and by a variety of arguments, by many creature abasing, and God exalting questions, he sets himself to cure this evil.

Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, about whom you thus contend? *ψ. 5.* He puts a slight upon himself and other ministers, that God might have the glory, whose is the power. They are but ministers by whom ye believed; they are ministers but not saviours, the instruments, but not authors of your faith; think not therefore above what is meet of any of them.

Again, their success is *as the Lord gave to every man*, *ψ. 5.* so that you should not boast of their gifts, nor make parties upon that account. The instrument can do nothing without the hand to use it.

It is true, I have planted, *Apollos* watered, but whoever does this, whether your admired *Paul* or *Apollos*, it is God that gives the increase, *ψ. 6.* so that all these you contend about of themselves are nothing; neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth any thing, but God that giveth the increase, *ψ. 7.* they have nothing but what they have received, and can do nothing but as they are succeeded.

These again are all one, *ψ. 8.* *Now he that planteth, and he that watereth are one.* In some things they may differ, but in this they are all agreed, according to the best of their capacities, to serve the interest of their common Lord. They are one in their work, and therefore ought not to be divided among themselves. They serve one master, and if they are faithful, pursue one and the same design.

Once more, he tells them, these are all theirs. 1 Cor. iii. 23. *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, all these are yours.* You need never contend about them, they are all for the common benefit, and advantage of the whole Church; profound *Paul*, eloquent *Apollos*, and solid *Cephas*. Therefore however they might value themselves upon this, as if it were an attainment, the Apostle tells them, in this they walked as men. Whatever they thought of it, there was much more of the *man* than the *christian* in it, therefore let no man glory in men; which brings us in the second place to the following *directions*.

I. Let ministers then give diligence in their work, as ever they expect God should give the increase of it. *Apollos* spake, and taught *diligently* the things of God, *Acts* xviii. 25. The more laborious the calling, the greater pains are required. Be wholly therefore in these things, says the Apostle to *Timothy*; give thy self to meditation, study and prayer, *so doing thou shalt save thy self, and them that hear thee*, 1 Tim. iv. 15, 16. Plant, water, sow thy seed in the morning, and in the evening with-hold not thy hand. Rather let it be said, I want success than diligence; and am unprofitable, than slothful and disobedient. Herein we perform our part, and do what lies upon us; and it will be our great comfort, when leaving this world, to have conscience testify to our sincerity herein, that we have endeavoured to fulfil our ministry, and profit the souls committed to our care; whereas, at such a time especially, how shall we be able to bear the reproaches of our own consciences, when they tell us we ascended the pulpit rather to shew our own wit, and learning, vent our passion, to please a fancy, promote a party, or advance our selves,

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than to profit the people, and save the souls of men?

II. Let the *people* then endeavour to profit; that is their duty. Be not satisfied that you are under the ministry of one, who shines and burns beyond others; you may do this rather for your credit than your profit; and boast, as these *Corinthians* did, I am of such a one, to be thought wiser than others, in the choice of so learned and celebrated a ministry, and fall into a secret contempt of others, as men of much inferior attainments. Remember your account for this will be so much the greater, and so much the sadder too, if such signal advantages are not answered by a suitable improvement. It will be sad to be cast into hell at last, for not profiting by these uncommon helps, after we had been exalted up to heaven by the enjoyment of them.

III. Implore this increase, both ministers and people; water the seed that is sown, with prayers and tears. Since God makes use of them to plant and water, they ought most earnestly to concern themselves herein, and be very intent upon carrying on this saving design; and since after all their care, the success depends entirely upon God's blessing, it behoves them to be very serious as well as frequent in their addresses to him, for this increase. Does all depend upon this? is it God that gives it? shall we not then ask it of him? what have we to do but besiege the throne of his grace with strong cries and earnest requests, that he would lend his hand, and command a blessing? for when the hand of the Lord is with us, many will believe and turn to the Lord, *Acts* xi. 21.

Sirs, what else are we doing this day? is it not our professed design, solemnly to invoke God on
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the behalf of him, that is now come to plant and water in this place*; that he would be present with his servant, command his blessing on his word and ordinances, give farther success, and fresh testimonies to the word of his grace; that he would preserve the peace and purity of this church, establish them in the truth as it is in Jesus, promote their growth and increase in grace and holiness, and cause them to abound in all the fruits of righteousness? and how reasonable, that what is done in this publick manner, should be our daily exercise in private? how often does the great Apostle bespeak the prayers of the meanest christians for himself and his fellow labourers? *Brethren pray for us, I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the spirit, that you strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me.* The greatest of ministers may be helped by the prayers of a plain honest christian. The Apostles were very sensible of this, and therefore begg'd the people to pray for them; we have a great work upon our hands, for which we have no sufficiency as of our selves; we are nothing; we can *do*, we shall *be* nothing of our selves; we shall not save one soul; our ministry will be a deadly savour to those that attend it, unless God give it a vital breath. We are but instruments, and what can these do without a hand to use them? we can but plant and water, God only can give the increase; oh therefore pray for this; beg it at his hands; I obtest it by all that is sacred and valuable for our sakes, for your own sakes, yea for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the spirit's sake, if you have any love to the Lord Jesus, any regard to and concern for him, his interest, his kingdom and glory; if you have

* The Reverend Mr. Robert Wright.

ever experienced the love of the spirit, and would return your love to him, don't fail to pray for us.

IV. If one plants and another watereth, then let us rejoice in each others success. The Apostle *Paul* had planted at *Corinth*; after him comes *Apollos*, and he waters what his predecessor had planted; he was not uneasy that *Apollos* entered upon his labours, nor grudged the success he had in watering, but went to his work the more cheerfully at *Ephesus*, knowing such an excellent man as *Apollos* was got to *Corinth*, to carry on what he had begun. Some of them would have set him up above *Paul*, and made him the head of a party against him; but notwithstanding this, he had no jealousy of him as his rival, nor any uneasiness at the people's esteem of him; they were both employed by one master, and engaged in the same design, and therefore would rejoice in each others success. It should please us that our master's work goes on, whatever hands he employs in the doing it; and make us glad the word prospers and is succeeded, whether we are more or less instrumental in it. Let it be no uneasiness to us, that there are others, who can do the Lord's work better than we can, and are so much owned in it beyond what we are: we should be content to be eclipsed, if Christ do but shine the brighter; if he encreases it is enough, though we decrease, O that there were such a spirit among us.

V. Whatever our success is, let God have the glory of it. It must be mighty pleasing to ministers, when they find themselves much followed, and taken great notice of; the people flock to them in multitudes; their labours are remarkably succeeded; the church is increased, and numbers are daily added

ded to it by their means; but under such a flow of success, there is great need to watch their own spirits, lest they should be vainly puffed up in their own minds, and arrogate that to themselves, which belongs alone to God. This brings to mind what is related of Pope *Adrian*, who having erected at great expence a noble college at *Louvain*, caus'd it to be written in letters of gold at the entrance into it, *Utrecht* planted, there he was born; *Louvain* watered, there he was educated; *Cesar* gave the increase; by his means he was of a preceptor made a cardinal. One to correct the vanity of the man, writ underneath, *here God did nothing*. This was very different from the Apostle, who, when he tells them, I have planted, *Apollos* watered, and a great increase there was and a rich harvest, acknowledges it all came from God, and he shall have the glory of it.

To conclude; if any are made great use of, and under their ministry the blind and ignorant are enlightened, and led into the way of salvation; the secure are awakened; the heedless and unthinking are roused to a sense of their danger; prophane and ungodly sinners are turned from their evil ways to God; in a word, if wandring and lost sheep are brought into Christ's fold, and those brought in are built up; if deluded and mistaken souls are reduced, and brought again into the way of truth; if weak and doubting consciences are resolved; if mourners in *Zion* and disconsolate souls are revived and comforted, others are not to look upon them, as though by their own power or holiness they had wrought such cures on the souls of men; nor should they look upon themselves, as if by their superior wisdom and learning they had performed these mighty things; they will not take the honour of all this to themselves, but carefully trans-

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mit it to God, to whom of right it belongs. How much soever they excel others in gifts and grace, they never make the word effectual by any power of their own. There are many souls in whom all this planting and watering is to no saving purpose; if it be of any real advantage to others, it is God that makes it so. *Paul* plants, *A-pollos* waters, but it is God that gives the increase; to him therefore be all the glory, now, and for ever. *Amen.*

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